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THE FIRST FOUR GENERATIONS OF THE SELLS FAMILY IN AMERICA

by

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FLINT, MICHIGAN

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THE SELLS FAMILY

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Early Ancestry

The Sells family, as we know it, came from the Palatinate in Germany, (Ger. Pfalz) but they originally came from near La Rochelle, France. It was later confirmed by a statement by William Sells, an early settler of St. Thomas, Ontario. He said they came from near Cologne, but originally from France. The name was Celle then, meaning a small room, hence they apparently came from small houses or ones made up of small rooms.

About 1655 they made their way to Germany, because of religious persecution by the French, and it did not end there for several times their lands were laid waste in the next several years, especially in 1674 and 1688. It became so bad that William Penn, whose mother came from the Palatinate, came to the rescue and invited the inhabitants to settle in Pennsylvania, where they could be free from further molestation. The name had taken on a German spelling but was pronounced the same — Zell or Zellen.

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On August 20, 1683 Francis Daniel Pastorius and thirteen families made the trek to America and settled at a place they called Germantown in Pennsylvania. They were soon followed by others and in the next five years there were fifty or more houses there. Others came for the next several years and eventually a sizable town grew up.

About the year 1689 Hendrick, Martin and Dirk Sellen came, six years after Pastorius and his original thirteen first settled. They were Mennonites and came from Mulheim on the Ruhr. Hendrick Sellen became very active in affairs in the new world and there are many records of transactions in which he was interested — acted as agent through which many transferred their properties and in 1698 he took a trip back to the homeland, at Crefeld, Germany and took with him many business communications and probably many messages of friendship as well. Hendrick Sell (Sellen) and his wife Mary gave the ground for the Church on the Skippock, and were listed as members of the Germantown Mennonite Church in 1708. He also became a trustee of the Church.

Among his children were John, Jacob, Peter and Henry. John Sell married Ann — and is listed as having paid quit rents before 1734. He is listed as a yeoman and his will is filed in Philadelphia — Book O — p. 88. He died in 1767, probably sometime in early February. Lived in Hanover township, Philadelphia county, Pa. His children were Solomon, Abraham, Peter, Henry, Anthony, Samuel, Benjamin and Elizabeth, the youngest and only daughter. Nothing further is noted about Jacob and Peter Sell. They lived in Cresheim township, late part of Germantown, Philadelphia County, Pa.

In 1710 a great number of Germans came over, landed at Philadelphia and settled on a 10,000 acre tract on Pequa Creek, Conestoga, just east of the Susquehana river in what is now Lancaster county. As it became thickly settled it naturally followed that they gradually moved westward and York county was established. Among the early settlers of York county we again find the name Sell, for we are told that Henry Sell joined a group of settlers in 1735, who had established homes for themselves near the town of Hanover. About 1741 or a little later, Abraham Sell also appeared in this locality. They were sons of Henry Sell of Germantown. In 1747 and 1749 they with twelve others petitioned Gov. Hamilton for protection from the unscrupulous Digges, whose shady transactions had jeopardized the title to their lands. Henry was a large man with a reddish crop of hair. He was a large land owner and had mills upon them. He died about 1751 before his land was all paid for, and lies in an unmarked grave. It was all paid up later in 1765 by his son Anthony. It was conveyed to him June 19, 1771 by the widow of the one who sold it. It consisted of 920 acres and was known as the Exchange. Mr. Sell was a miller by trade.

No evidence is available how Abraham Sell looked. He was also a landowner and is buried in a marked grave in Littlestown, Pa. He died in 1786 and left a will on file at York, Pa. During the war of the Revolution he was a Captain of York county infantry. His children were Adam, Jacob, Catherine and Eve.

In 1774 Anthony Sells, as now spelled, and his children left Mt. Joy township for what was known as Standing Stone, an Indian village and here established the town of Huntingdon, Pa. Ludwick his oldest son set up a Log Hotel, bought the site of the County building and became very

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active in civic affairs. Sons Abraham and Solomon bought farms in the nearby country, finally Abraham bought the site of the Bebault mill at the junction of Spruce Creek and Little Juniata river and ran a grist mill and saw mill there for ten years. It is now known as Spruce Creek. Anthony died in 1792 and left a will on file at the County Court building at Huntingdon. He left a wife Catherine. In 1798 the whole family broke up and went to various parts of the country where they established branches of the family. Ludwick went to Franklin County, Ohio. He settled first at the site of Columbus and later moved up the river ten miles and built himself a new home. He became a well established citizen. Built later the site of Dublin, Ohio and he and his sons built a tavern and mills there. He died and is buried in the Dublin cemetery. His descendants have been prominent in Politics, Manufacture, Medicine, Science, a Circus and Agriculture. On the monument is the following: Ludwick Sells born February 15, 1743, died October 18, 1823. Catherine Deardorff Sells born March 5, 1749, died December 1, 1823. He had married Catherine Deardorff of York county, Pa.

Solomon Sells went to Bristol, Va., then called South Carolina. Born in York county Sept. 2, 1750 died in Washington county, Va. before May 21, 1816. Married Margaret Ashbaugh, daughter of Henry Ashbaugh. Many descendants are still in the South and are prominent as Agriculturists and many are vital in the Methodist Church.

Abraham Sells went to Port Ryerse, Ontario and died 2 weeks later, but his family stayed on. He was born in York county, Pa. October 28, 1752 and died in 1798. Married Mary Wilson, daughter of John Wilson, Barre county, Pa. (August 14, 1754 died August 7, 1846 buried in Frome cemetery near St. Thomas, Ont.) Was a saw miller, a grist miller and had a tavern. Mr. Sells was buried in the cemetery in Port Ryerse, Ont. A plaque was placed at each of their graves by their descendants on September 3, 1934 commemorating the establishing of the family in Canada. Many of their descendants are Agriculturists, Lawyers, Inventors, Practitioners of Medicine, Foundrymen, Workers in Iron, and builders of Mills.

Anthony Sells Jr. went to Ohio county, Va. earlier than 1798. Nothing further is known about him. He was a farmer. Born in York county, Pa. May 9, 1754. Married Barbara Gerker.

Sophia Sells born in York county, Pa. November 26, 1756. Married Frederick Ashbaugh son of Henry Ashbaugh of Huntingdon county and went to Hagerstown, Md. where they were interested in large land holdings.

Esther Sells birth unknown, married Conrad Brumbaugh, Chief Burgess of Harrisburg, Pa. Died there before her father. Had one son Abraham born April 23, 1770 in Paxtang township, Lancaster county, Pa. Married Catherine Reem. They had three children: Aaron, Catherine and Sarah. Entertained Gen. Washington at their home in Harrisburg.

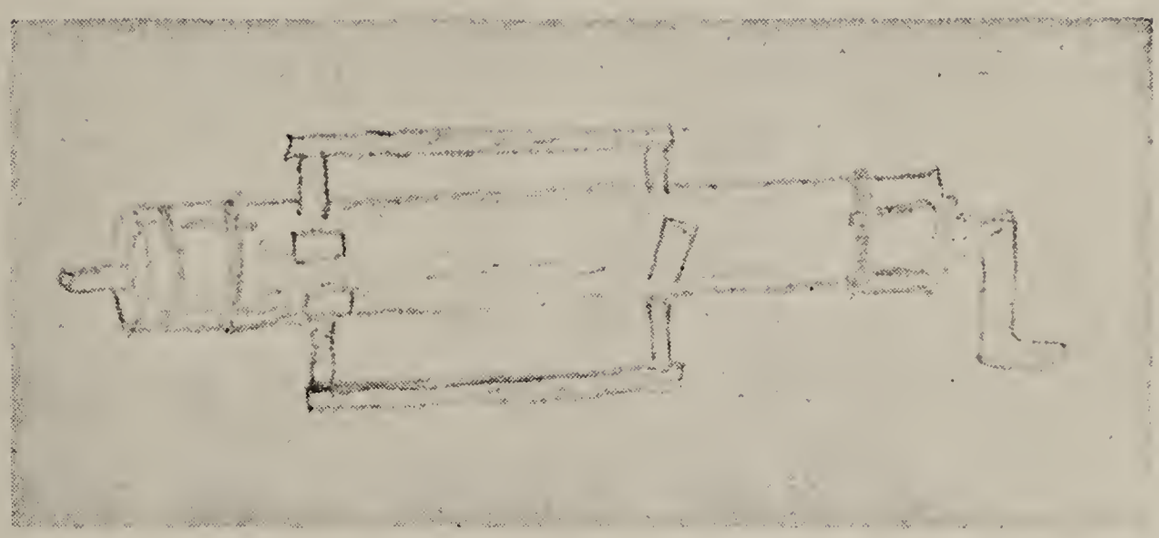
It is not certain what became of John Sells but it is assumed he remained in Pa. He was born in York county on April 2, 1747 and signed all of his father's papers. Was apparently quite alert in a business way.

Jacob Sell was also a son of Henry Sell. He lived near Littlestown, Pa. and inherited some 500 acres of land from his father and had a saw mill upon his property. He always lived there, raised a family of nine children who finally located as follows: Jacob — Adams county, Pa., Daniel — Carrol county, Md., Abraham — Blair county, Pa., Maria — Adams county, Pa., Margaret — Adams county, Pa., and John, David, Peter and Henry, Starke county, Ohio. Jacob Sell Sr. is buried in Littlestown cemetery and has a common brownstone marker on which is the following inscription in the German language: Died October 23, 1825, aged 82 years, 10 months and 23 days. He married Christina Hes - Zohn and she is buried beside her husband and has the following inscription: Born 1753 — Died 1820 aged 67 years and 8 months. Many descendants still remain of this family and are noted as farmers, gun makers, editorial writers, manufacturing, medicine, and various other occupations.

John Sell is thought to be another son. There is a record of his living in Germany township in Adams county. He married Dorothy Eckert and had a daughter Catherine born May 5, 1762. No other information is available concerning him.

Another Henry Sell thought to be a son of Henry Sell was one who died in 1797 and his will is on file in Frederick county, Md., under date of August 31, 1797. He lived in York county, Pa. and had property in Washington county, Md. His children consisted of: John, Henry, Adam, Peter, Elizabeth, Hesther, and Margaret.

This information is rather fragmentary but it is all that is available to date. It is recounted here to preserve for future generations.



Hub to Water Wheel, preserved as punk, found in 1932 in the mud at bottom of Wheel Race, Spruce Creek, Pa. Owned by Abraham Sells 1788-1798. Sketched by R. S. Morrish, M.D.

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